The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Liberia

Twenty-first progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia (S/2010/429)

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter from the representative of Liberia, in which she requests to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite that representative to participate in the consideration of the item, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Ms. Kamara (Liberia) took a seat at the Council table.

The President: In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Ms. Ellen Margrethe Løj, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and head of the United Nations Mission in Liberia.

It is so decided.

I invite Ms. Løj to take a seat at the Council table.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Security Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

I wish to draw the attention of members to document S/2010/429, containing the twenty-first progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear a briefing by Ms. Løj. I now give the floor to Ms. Løj.

Ms. Løj: I would like to thank you, Sir, for this opportunity to present the twenty-first progress report of the Secretary-General (S/2010/429) on the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). In doing so, I extend my appreciation to the members of the Security Council for their support to the work of the Mission. As many of them know, I have been engaged with Liberia for several years now, from when I served on the Council and chaired the sanctions Committee in 2005 and 2006, through my present appointment as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and coordinator of United Nations operations.

From this vantage point, I can attest to the tremendous progress that Liberia has made in recent years, much of which has been made possible by the security umbrella that the United Nations peacekeeping mission has provided. I must also praise President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf for her strong commitment to peace consolidation and the advancement of Liberia's development goals. As I have previously stated in this Chamber, nowhere is it more clearly illustrated than in Liberia that there cannot be sustainable security without development, and there cannot be sustainable development without security.

Council Members will already have had a chance to read the Secretary-General's most recent progress report detailing recent developments in the country. I will thus focus my remarks on some recent events that illustrate that a number of critical areas still need to be addressed to achieve further progress and to enable UNMIL to successfully hand over its responsibilities.

While the overall situation in Liberia has remained stable, it continues to be fragile, and additional progress is needed in a number of areas to truly consolidate the peace. Liberia has asked to be added to the agenda of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) and hosted a visit from the Commission just a few weeks ago. The Government has specified rule of law, security sector reform and national reconciliation as important priority areas to the Commission. If I may add, Liberia being on the agenda of the PBC would offer a unique opportunity for the Security Council and the Commission to ensure that peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts become mutually supportive in line with resolution 1645 (2005).

Security within the subregion is calm but fragile, and the Mission continues to monitor developments along the borders very closely, as well as recent events in Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire. UNMIL's presence represents a stabilizing influence in the subregion and

serves as a deterrent to illegal cross-border activities, including drug trafficking.

Internally, Liberia still faces potentially destabilizing security challenges arising from mob violence, ethnic and communal tensions, competition for natural resources, land disputes, sexual and gender-based violence, and armed robbery. Alarming rates of unemployment, including among youth and ex-combatants, raise further security concerns. UNMIL has also noted the increasing availability of regionally made guns, which are smuggled into Liberia. These are quickly becoming the weapons of choice for many criminals, illegal rubber-tappers and those engaged in illegal mining. UNMIL has intensified its work with the Government to address the legislative and operational gaps in small arms control in Liberia.

Security incidents, like those described in the progress report in Harper and Lofa raise serious concerns. Many are originally sparked by minor incidents that quickly develop into large-scale security situations. These easily overwhelm local security institutions and require UNMIL intervention to contain. Numerous prison disturbances have also arisen in reaction to poor conditions and outbreaks of disease, and unfortunately, needs are addressed only when they culminate in violence. Also, just last week, violence erupted on the grounds of one of Liberia's larger rubber plantations, the LAC plantation in Grand Bassa county. The issue is all too familiar, as workers in large concession areas continue to clash with company management in the pursuit of improved labour conditions, and local security actors are unable to contain these alone.

Liberians' low confidence in the justice system highlights the importance of strengthening the rule of law and security institutions. One year ago, following my briefing to the Council, representatives of the Government of Liberia presented strategic plans for key security institutions in a special partners' forum. While I believe that those presentations were well received, the plans still require substantial donor support if they are to be effectively implemented. Given the fact that Liberia's major security threats are internal rather than external, it will be important to ensure that security agencies, especially the police, immigration and corrections services, are strengthened to meet their future operational challenges.

While we continue to encourage the Government to progressively increase budgetary allocations to the security sector, we are all fully aware of the financial limitations. The reality is that much more external support will be required, and I cannot appeal strongly enough to Member States to come forward to support the Government in these endeavours.

The Liberian political scene is fully seized with preparations for the 2011 presidential and legislative elections, and much activity has been ongoing to adopt key legislation, mobilize resources and build capacity. In late July, the legislature adopted a joint resolution that will serve as the framework for the next elections, commonly referred to as the Threshold Bill. This law is a political compromise reached after months of debate, and endorses the current 64 seats in the House of Representatives while adding another nine seats to be delineated by the National Elections Commission. This compromise was a significant achievement since earlier versions of the bill were highly controversial and had even been vetoed twice by the President.

Both legislative houses recently enacted another outstanding piece of legislation, a joint resolution proposing amendments to election-related provisions of the Constitution. These amendments include moving election day from October to November in order to move it out of the rainy season by a few weeks, and allowing simple majorities to determine winners in all electoral races, except for the two highest offices, President and Vice-President. For these changes to the Constitution to take effect, a referendum is needed, but cannot be held less than 12 months after the legislature's action. The National Elections Commission has indicated that it will not be possible for it to conduct a referendum before the next elections.

As is mentioned in the Secretary-General's progress report, the 2011 elections will be a critical test for Liberia on its path to democratic stability. The Government and its partners have been busy preparing for this important event, and the electoral timetable was announced on 27 August, with voter registration to start in January. However, the National Elections Commission will not be able to successfully organize elections without the international community's support. While considerable pledges have been made, more is needed, particularly if the constitutional amendments are not yet applicable and the

Commission is faced with having to conduct more than 80 runoffs across the country.

National reconciliation is crucial to durable peace in Liberia. The President recently submitted her second quarterly report on the implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's recommendations. In it, she reaffirmed her support for a nationwide Palava Hut programme, a traditional reconciliation mechanism in which perpetrators can publicly ask for forgiveness, and named a range of actors to become involved in addressing recommendations in a number of other areas, including prosecution. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report, especially the implementation of its recommendations, remains a key point of interest, but other measures to address root causes of the conflict also deserve attention. The President has presented a new set of nominees to the Independent National Commission on Human Rights to the Senate for consideration, and it is hoped that they will soon be confirmed. This is crucial, as the Commission will be necessary both to support reconciliation efforts and to serve as a publicly accessible human rights institution for all Liberians.

While deeper issues and cleavages in society have yet to be addressed, the Government has also announced an ambitious initiative, the Liberia National Vision 2030, linked to achieving economic growth and strengthening national identity and citizenship, which should help make these issues more prominent in public discourse. All of these programmes need to be designed in an inclusive manner to ensure that Liberia never again experiences the nightmare that its people suffered in the recent decades of conflict and war.

A considerable milestone was achieved this summer when Liberia reached the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Debt Initiative completion point, qualifying for debt relief of $4.6 billion. Reducing the country's debt burden frees up resources to finance expenditures in areas critical to the success of the poverty reduction strategy, now in its final year of implementation. The Government's sustained implementation of a strong macroeconomic programme and ambitious reform agenda was instrumental in Liberia's completion of the HIPC process.

However, it is important to note that the Government still faces extreme financial constraints. The proposed budget for the current fiscal year still being debated in the legislature totals just $347 million to cover all Government expenditures. The needs are daunting, especially in a country building its institutions, facing extremely poor infrastructure, and struggling to provide basic social services to its population. Furthermore, while significant progress has been made in strengthening accountability and transparency, more effort is needed to tackle corruption, which has the potential to seriously hinder Liberia's development objectives.

I am pleased to highlight the efforts undertaken by the Government of Liberia and the Mission to advance planning for the handover of security responsibilities, including at the level of the Government security pillar and the National Security Council. As demonstrated in the June workshop on security transition planning and in subsequent work, the Government has taken ownership of the process and recognizes the need for early planning to provide the time and space for Liberia to stand up security institutions, especially the police. We are jointly working on a comprehensive situational assessment and identifying gaps in individual security agencies that will have to be filled to ensure a successful transition. As part of this process, it is envisioned that our current consolidation, drawdown and withdrawal benchmarks, which covered the Mission's drawdown phase, will be revised to incorporate specific transition-related indicators and thus become transition benchmarks.

The Mission will also continue its work with the United Nations country team related to handing over and phasing out its civilian activities, and at the same time adjusting the work of the United Nations in response to the Government's request that Liberia become a self-starter delivering as one country. A high-level summit on delivering as one is planned for October to formally endorse the initiative and establish a joint steering committee. With the final year of implementation of the poverty reduction strategy now under way and the Government looking ahead to its next development strategy, continued coherence among United Nations actors and other partners will be of paramount importance to achieving desired results.

I would be remiss if I did not use this opportunity to express our appreciation to the troop- and police-contributing countries for their support to the Mission. I would also appeal to them to ensure that awareness of sexual exploitation and abuse is raised before police and troops deploy to the Mission area and that timely

follow-up of investigations takes place. I would like to reiterate my request to troop and police contributors to inform the Mission of investigation outcomes and of any measures taken against those found responsible for any infraction. As Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Liberia, I spare no opportunity to raise the issue of sexual exploitation and abuse with all personnel, civilian and uniformed alike. By working closely together with our troop and police contributors, I trust that we can do better to encourage all members of the Mission to refrain from these demeaning acts — acts that in themselves defeat the whole purpose of our work.

Let me conclude by stating that there have been many positive developments in Liberia. Seven years of unbroken peace — the longest in decades — have allowed Liberians to begin to believe, to be optimistic about the future and, day by day, to start taking charge and shaping the direction of their country. However, these positive developments are tempered by a fragile peace that relies heavily on the presence of UNMIL military and police.

Liberia will continue to require substantial international support and assistance for the foreseeable future. Recovering from a long civil war requires leadership, resources and time. The Government of Liberia is providing the leadership and readiness to take ownership. Donors need to be generous and expectations need to be realistic about how quickly goals can be realized. I am confident that Liberians can count on the continued support of the Council.

The President: I thank Ms. Løj for her briefing.

I now give the floor to the Permanent Representative of Liberia.

Ms. Kamara (Liberia): I did not come prepared to make a statement, but I think the least that I can do is, through the Council, to express our appreciation for the support that has been provided to Liberia over time by the peacekeeping Mission and by the continued extension of its mandate and presence.

I also want to express our appreciation to troop-contributing countries that have deployed their forces in Liberia and constitute the mainstay of peace and security, as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General has stated. I also want to thank her for the exceptional guidance that she is providing to the peacekeeping Mission.

Liberia appreciates all the support that it is receiving. The Government is making tremendous efforts to move forward with the rehabilitation and reconstruction programmes. I would like to confirm what the Special Representative of the Secretary-General has said to the effect that, while we are grateful for what has been provided, continuous support is indeed needed. We are hopeful that placing Liberia on the agenda of the Peacebuilding Commission will give further impetus to the efforts that are taking place on the ground.

I would again like to thank the President for the opportunity to participate in this meeting.

The President: There are no further speakers inscribed on my list.

In accordance with the understanding reached in the course of the Council's prior consultations, I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion of the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.35 a.m.